

Policy Examiner

Dispatches about the Colorado Commission on Affordable Health Care



Scope of Work to be Discussed in March

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The Colorado Commission on Affordable Health Care will start to establish its research agenda at its next meeting on March 9.

After seven months of set-up work, the meeting promises to be the first major discussion of the commission's charter from the legislature to examine health care costs in Colorado.

It's a very broad topic that will need to be narrowed, said Chairman Bill Lindsay during the commission's February 9 meeting. The question is where to start.

"We are not going to be able to deal with every aspect of health care," Lindsay said.

Several commissioners have said they want to look first at "low-hanging fruit" — recommendations that the legislature would have the power to enact. Commissioner Steve ErkenBrack said the group's recommendations need to be more useful to the legislature than some "nice theories" that could never be implemented without major changes in federal law.

The commission now has three subcommittees to handle planning, communications and research. The research committee is supposed to identify data and studies for the full commission to discuss, but its role is still being worked out. If the research committee had to thoroughly vet all ideas before bringing them to the full commission, then most commissioners wouldn't have much to do for months, Lindsay said.

Still, ErkenBrack said, the volunteer commissioners won't have the time to sort through all the information he expects to receive, so the research committee will have to do some vetting.

"There are many cost drivers, and you could spend an eternity on just one... We are going to have to prioritize," ErkenBrack said.

Commissioners also got their first look at a preliminary budget at the February meeting.

Committee Assignments

Commissioners have been assigned to one of three standing committees:

Planning	Research	Communications
Greg D'Argonne	Elisabeth Arenales	Jeffrey Cain
Bill Lindsay	Ira Gorman	Rebecca Cordes
Cindy Sovine-Miller	Linda Gorman	Steve ErkenBrack
Chris Tholen	Dorothy Ann Perry	Marcy Morrison
	Jay Want	

The legislature appropriated \$400,000 to fund the commission through its three-year life. But the new budget calls for spending \$489,000 over just the first two years.

"This is a recognition that the appropriation we received not only does not cover all three years, but (not even) the first time period, and we will have to look for additional funding," said Chris Tholen, a member of the commission's planning committee.

Most of the proposed budget is devoted to hiring contractors. The commission has hired The Keystone Center to organize its meetings and coordinate public involvement, and it has contracted with the Colorado Health Institute to provide data and analysis. (CHI is independently preparing this series of reports through its core funding, not through the contract with the commission.)

The budget also includes \$50,000 to purchase data from the Center for Improving Value in Health Care or other sources, as well as money for public meetings around the state.

The schedule of those meetings is still being finalized.